

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3

THE NATIONAL GUARDIAN
10 December 1980

Right-wing smears IPS as 'KGB front'

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Washington, D.C.

It started almost a year ago as fiction. Then it became innuendo and allegation. Now it's being asserted as fact.

Such has been the transformation of the right-wing notion that the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) is a front for the KGB, the Soviet intelligence agency. A left-liberal research organization here, IPS is currently the target of a concerted and particularly vicious attack by various conservative and reactionary groups.

Although IPS has been the subject of rightist criticism on several occasions during its 17-year history, the "KGB-front" campaign began in earnest with the publication earlier this year of "The Spike," a best-selling novel by CIA admirers Robert Moss and Arnaud DeBorchgrave. According to "The Spike," a key component of the KGB's insidious attempts to enslave the "free world" is the Washington-based "Institute for Progressive Reform," an influential think-tank that poses as a noncommunist advocate of social democratic policies.

Most readers and reviewers of "The Spike" correctly equated "IPR" with IPS, but the novel was generally shrugged off as a basically harmless fantasy created by a couple of clever and amusing paranoids. Moss' and DeBorchgrave's book quickly inspired a number of quasi-factual analyses of the world situation, however.

References to IPS's "true affiliation" began appearing in the jumbled analyses of U.S. left organizations regularly inserted in the Congressional Record by Rep. Larry MacDonald, the John Birch Society mouth-piece from Georgia. During the summer, "Midstream" magazine ran an article by Rael Jean Isaac on IPS' "links and contacts." The lengthy analysis in this Zionist monthly focused on the Institute's research projects and personnel that have even indirectly criticized Israel. But Isaac's attack was not confined to denunciations of IPS as an alleged ally of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

"The Institute," she wrote, "represents an unprecedented success story: the achievement of the New Left, after its supposed demise, in shaping U.S. policy." This portrayal of IPS as a haven for unrepentant and supposedly influential "new leftists" is itself a reiteration of charges made in a 1977 paper produced by the new-right Heritage Foundation. Isaac also expands on another Heritage fabrication: that IPS is an octopus-like conglomerate with various arms extending all over the country and throughout the world.

Then comes the centerpiece of the campaign. "The activities of the Institute inevitably raise serious questions of motivation," Isaac says. "IPS has consistently advocated policies that accord with the Soviet line. . . . Brian Crozier of the London Institute for the Study of Conflict says bluntly that IPS is the 'perfect intellectual front for Soviet activities that would be resisted if they were to originate openly from the KGB.'"

The Isaac piece was then excerpted in the July 7 and July 14 issues of "Barron's" magazine, a Wall Street review. "National Review," William Buckley's biweekly magazine, later featured a review of IPS fellow Saul Landau's book "Assassination on Embassy Row" by "Spike" co-author Moss. In that critique, Moss raised another theme common to rightist assaults on IPS and its staff. Orlando Letelier, an exiled Chilean diplomat who worked at the Institute at the time of his assassination, was actually a Cuban agent, Moss charged.

WHY IPS?

This allegation, meant to smear both the Chilean resistance and its U.S. supporters, also appeared in "Washington Quarterly," a journal produced by the neo-conservative Center for Strategic and International Studies of Georgetown University. It is likewise a favorite line of attack pursued by Accuracy in Media and other new-right groups.

The broad hints and qualified suppositions that IPS is somehow a Soviet front have now become flat-out assertions. The October issue of "Westwatch," a newsletter published by the far-right Center for Inter-American Security, begins its lead article with this claim: "A recently published best selling novel has openly and correctly portrayed the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., as a Soviet front organization." Author Phillip Abbott Luce then adds, "I do not casually indict the IPS as a communist front." He later states, "IPS is a KGB 'black propaganda' agency. . . ."

"Forbes" magazine, the self-described

"capitalist tool," does not go this far in its own assault on IPS in the Nov. 24 issue. But columnist John Train does repeat the by-now standard accusations of the 1977 Heritage Foundation study, and he also cites the Letelier-as-communist-agent charge. Train concludes his second-hand slandering by urging business executives to counteract IPS' supposedly pervasive influence by contributing to the right-wing cause of their choice.

"Many different groups on the right are coming together around this theme—Zionists, ultra-reactionaries, Sen. Moynihan's wing, former CIA employees and Reaganites," says IPS director Robert Borosage. "The purpose is to create a political consensus by using IPS as a metaphor in their efforts to revive a cold war consciousness and to initiate a McCarthy-like purge in this country."

Asked why IPS is being singled out by the right, Borosage told the Guardian: "The Institute brings liberals and the left together both in the third world and here in D.C. Our rather small organization is really the only place in Washington where this occurs, and, besides, we also employ a number of third world people—something that the right finds offensive in itself."

"We also work on both domestic and foreign issues," Borosage continued, "and that's, I suppose, the genesis of their claim that the Institute is this sort of gigantic and sinister web. The basic purpose of this campaign seems to be to break links between liberals and the left, to reestablish a bipartisan foreign policy line and to set new limits on what's considered legitimate debate in the U.S."